Modernity at Home

A Genealogy of the Indian Drawing Room

04

Archive series

Rosinka Chaudhuri



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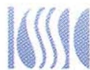
A Genealogy of the Indian Drawing Room

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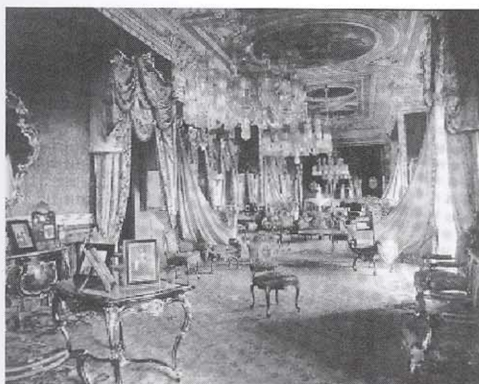
Cover Image

Nayak and Nayika (A pair of ideal lovers) sitting beside a table. Black and white woodcut. From Ashit Paul ed. *Woodcut Prints of Nineteenth Century Calcutta* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1983) p. 39.

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Although social scientists have engaged in an exploration of how modern men and women may become subjects as well as objects of modernization, how they might 'get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it' (Berman 1993: 13), one aspect of modern living has consistently eluded investigation. In the context of India's multiple modernities, alongside the boulevard and the monument, the city space and its architecture, the spaces *within* homes too were being redefined and rearranged to accommodate the arrival of modernity. Changing spaces within the home and representations of that change in literary terms can be seen to have functioned as primary markers of modernity in the colonial world. That the material manifestations of the home underwent a transformation in India through colonial contact is undisputed common sense, but very little work has focussed on the manner in which these changes occurred. Mapping the political, social and cultural changes in the evolving history of modernity in the Indian context, what follows is a history of a social space, the colonial drawing room. (Figure 1) Changes in the form and substance of this room, uniquely a confluence of the public and the private within the space of the home, were mediated by the development outside it of certain practices, institutions and spaces characteristic of modernity everywhere. Trams, bookshops, teashops, gaslights, electric lights, trains, the theatre, the museum and the public library are only some of the spaces in the 19th and early 20th century that characterized modernity in Calcutta, but one of the most crucial, although the most tangentially discussed, was the space of the modern drawing room.



It is my contention that in Bengal, the bourgeois drawing room came into its own at about the same time as the *adda* (which is a Bengali word for extended sessions of conversation with friends), which, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has attested, attained respectability by its association with literary and political groups in Calcutta in the 1920s and 1930s (Chakrabarty 2001: 180–214).[1] This was also the time when the drawing room transformed itself into its current hybridized Indian form, attaining, in some circles, an aesthetic style and a cultural ambience that was created as a deliberate attempt at Indianization. Here, I shall attempt a narrative history of the cultural space of the modern Indian drawing room as it evolved in Bengal over the course of a century, showing how this meeting of the public and the private within the space of the home metamorphosed from an exercise in colonial mimicry to an attempt at self-definition and national identity. One of the most interesting manifestations of the intrusion of

Figure 1 : A colonial-style drawing room at the Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad. From the Taj Magazine, Autumn 2010 (volume 38: No. 2) 241



Figure 2 : This photograph of the Pathuriaghata Mallickbari manages to convey some sense of Bankimchandra's drawing room, with the *phorash bichhana* spread out on the floor, surrounded by couches and chairs and paintings on the wall. The clutter of marble busts and figures, as well as the enormous chandelier, make this a different sort of drawing room, with greater pretensions to wealth, but the essential arrangement remains similar to what Nabin Sen saw in Bankim's home. From Debashis Bandyopadhyay and Alok Mitra, *Bonedi Kolkatar Gharbari* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2008).

modernity into the traditional space of the home was to be found in the territorial confluence of the drawing room, the transformation of which tells its own story of identity formation and cultural definition in terms of the evolving individuality of the nation-state.

The sitting-rooms of Young Bengal

In one of the most enlivening autobiographies to be written in colonial India, *Amaar Jiban* (My Life), Nabinchandra Sen, a well-known Bengali poet of his time, describes the room in which the famous novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay received him in his house in Naihati in 1877:

"He [Sanjibchandra, Bankimchandra's older brother] put his left hand affectionately around me and, taking me to a room, seated me on a thick rug [*phorash bichhana*] and sent word to Bankimbabu. I heard that this was Bankimbabu's drawing room [*baithak khana*]. It was a *hall* adjacent to a small Shiva temple room, and on the far side, there were two rooms. All around the *hall*, near the walls, there were two or three *couches* and *cushioned chairs*. The walls had a few paintings hanging on them, and in one corner, there was a harmonium. I was looking at the way in which the room was decorated and talking to Sanjib-babu". (Sen 1366 BE : vol.1, 456[2]. My translation. All following translations from the Bengali are mine.) (Figure 2)

This account of Bankimchandra's drawing room, in which the words 'hall', 'couches' and 'cushioned chairs' are in English, has an interesting counterpoint in Bankimchandra's own satirical description of the sitting room of a Europeanized babu. In 'The Confession of a Young Bengal' (1872) -- which referred to the radical students of Derozio at the Hindu College between 1826 and 1831 (or to those who were like them) -- Bankimchandra had parodied the borrowed tastes of an English-educated Anglophile:

"Chairs, tables, punkahs (fans)—seldom meant to be pulled, American clocks, glassware of variegated hues, pictures for which the *Illustrated London News* is liberally laid under contribution, kerosene lamps, book-shelves filled with Reynolds' *Mysteries*, Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* and the *Complete Poetical Works* of Lord Byron, English musical-boxes, compose the fashionable furniture of the sitting-rooms of Young Bengal." (Chatterjee 1998: 137)

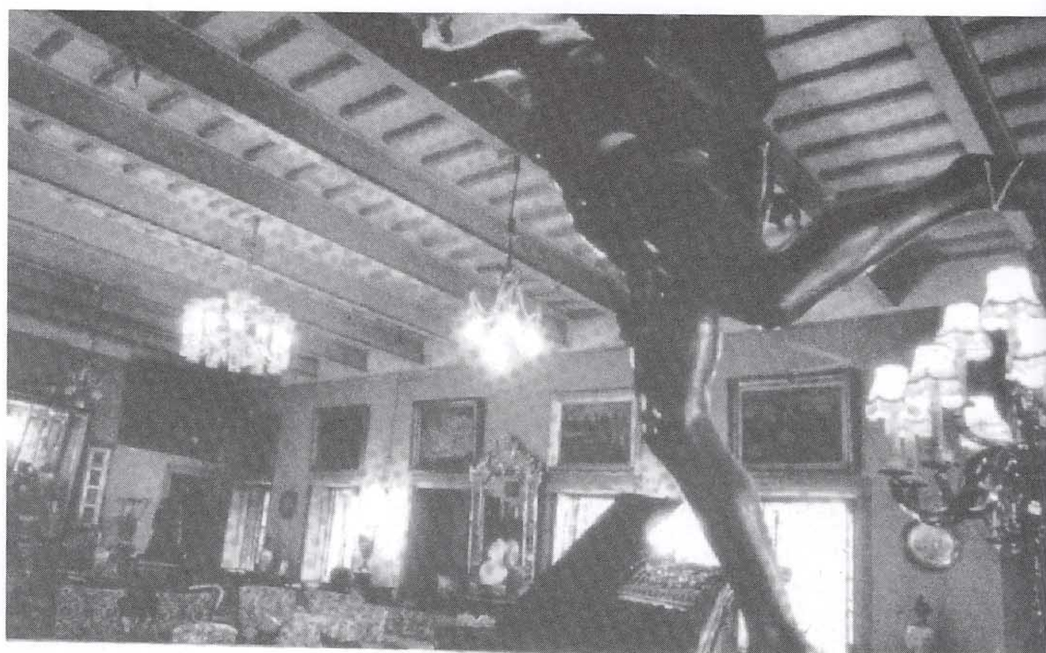
The comparative bareness of Bankimchandra's own drawing room may now perhaps be read as deliberately arranged in contrast to the European clutter that he finds so distasteful in the imitative drawing rooms of Young Bengal, keeping in mind all the while, however, his own not inconsiderable investment in the high cultural appurtenances of European civilization. Exhibitionism and pretension were obviously often the dominant characteristics of the early elite drawing room in Calcutta, and satire the most common weapon against them. Ten years earlier, Kaliprasanna Singha, in the celebrated *Hutom Pyanchar Naksha* [Night Owl's Sketches] had given Bengalis the most trenchant description of the profligacy and licentiousness of those members of society who had preceded Young Bengal, the depravity of whose character seemed only to be matched by the abject imitativeness of their Western-style drawing rooms:

"These days the city's English-style babus belong to two factions, the first group, 'Cow dung busts of superior model sahibs'; the second 'Vile reflections of the foreigner'. All those who belong to the first lot follow the English fashion, gathering at tables and chairs, tea in tea cups, *cheroots*, water in *jugs*, *brandy* in *decanters*, covers of cork wrapped in red cotton cloth for *glass* tumblers—the *Harkara*, *Englishman*, and the *Phoenix* in front of them, *Politics* and the *Best News*

3



Figure 3 : 'They eat at tables...' Kaliprasanna said, in the 'English fashion, gathering at tables and chairs, tea in tea cups...' This early advertisement for Lipton Tea gives some sense of the imitative aspect of the Bengali babu and his drawing room in the nineteenth century. Note the wall paper and carpet, ornate mirror and book case, as well as, of course, the bearer with the turban and the teapot. Babu's Drawing Room, Wood engraving, Preo Gopal Das, c. 1920. From the collection of Christel Das and Arup Sen Gupta, CSSSC Archive.



of the Day the subjects of perpetual argument. They eat on tables, defecate in *commodes* and wipe their bums with paper. They are ornamented with the various virtues of compassion, pity, benevolence, meekness; yet are always prone to disease, drunkenness and being henpecked—enthusiasm, unity, desire for progress having been entirely exiled from their hearts. These are the *old class*." (Nag 1991: 46–47; words in italics are those originally used in the text) (Figure 3)

This 'old class' described here by Kaliprasanna in 1861 preceded the 'new'; a little later in this passage, Kaliprasanna mentions Digambar Mitra, a student of Derozio, under the alias 'Bagambar Mitra', as belonging to the new class, even more dangerous than the old because of the hollow piety of their wish for reform.[3] Any photograph of the preserved ancestral homes of the then nouveau riche in nineteenth-century Calcutta will confirm these descriptions, as a glance at Debashish Bandyopadhyay and Alok Mitra's *Banedi Kalkatar Gharbari* [*Aristocratic Homes of Calcutta*] (2002) shows. (Figure 4) A visit to the Marble Palace of the Jorasanko Mullicks today will find such a drawing room enshrined as a museum, with the massive many-pillared exterior of the palace matched by vast expanses of marble floors and chandeliers overhead, oil paintings on the walls in imitation of Titian or Rubens and marble busts and sculptures of nubile nymphets on ornate tables, resulting in the most fantastically bizarre and mixed-up extremity of mimicry. (Figure 5; Figure 6) From Bankimchandra's own drawing room, to the sitting rooms of Young Bengal, to the resplendent kitsch of the Marble Palace, we travel from a modishly accoutred to an outrageously scaled Victorian conception of a sitting room, drawing room or parlour, whichever nomenclature one chooses.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the drawing room as 'a room for comfortable sitting or entertaining in a private house' derived from

Figure 4 : Gorachand Mullick's house, Pathuriaghata. From Debashis Bandyopadhyay and Alok Mitra, *Bonedi Kolkatar Gharbari* (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 2008).



the original 'withdrawing room' because it was once used as a room for women to withdraw to after dinner. The thing itself was, in its entirety, a European import. Traditionally, the Bengali home would have had, among many other sections to an affluent house, the *andarmahal* or inner chambers for the women and domestic affairs, and the *bahirmahal* or outer rooms where business was conducted by the men and male visitors received. With the rise of the professional classes in the nineteenth century, the outer chambers were the ones in which lawyers would meet their clients and court-related matters be discussed; unconnected to the rest of the house either structurally or mentally, these rooms had only a tenuous link with the modern space of the drawing room as it gradually evolved in late 19th and early 20th century urban geographies.

The *baithak-khana* was the Hindustani term for a private reception area in the houses of Muslim nobility; the word itself signified assembly, which was, in most instances, performative in aspect, devoted to the appreciation of music or dance (the infamous *nautch*) in the *zamindari* houses of old. This large hall was put to similar uses in the Hindu zamindar household; thus Solvyns has depicted the performance of *Ramayan-gan* in such a household in 1808, in which we see a large

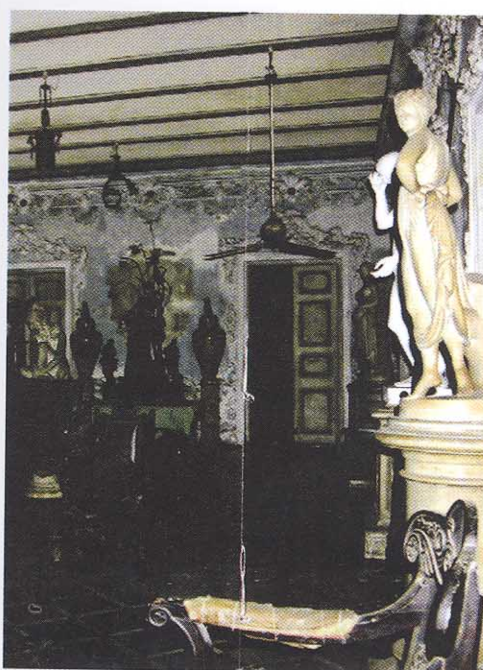


Figure 5 : Exterior of the Jorasanko Marble Palace of the Mallicks. Courtesy Priyanka Khastgir, December, 2010.

Figure 6 : The interior of the Marble Palace. From Joanne Taylor, *The Forgotten Palaces of Calcutta* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2006).

assembly gathered in a room of lofty proportions to listen to the musical performance. (Figure 7) A description of the changes in the living rooms of the Muslim elite in the 1860s soon after the Great Rebellion of 1857 is provided in the first major Urdu novel, *Taubat-al-Nasûh* [*The Repentance of Nussooh*] (1884) by Nazir Ahmed. Here we have a picture of the nascent drawing room used as recreational space and permeated by outside influences in the house of an elite Muslim family in Delhi:

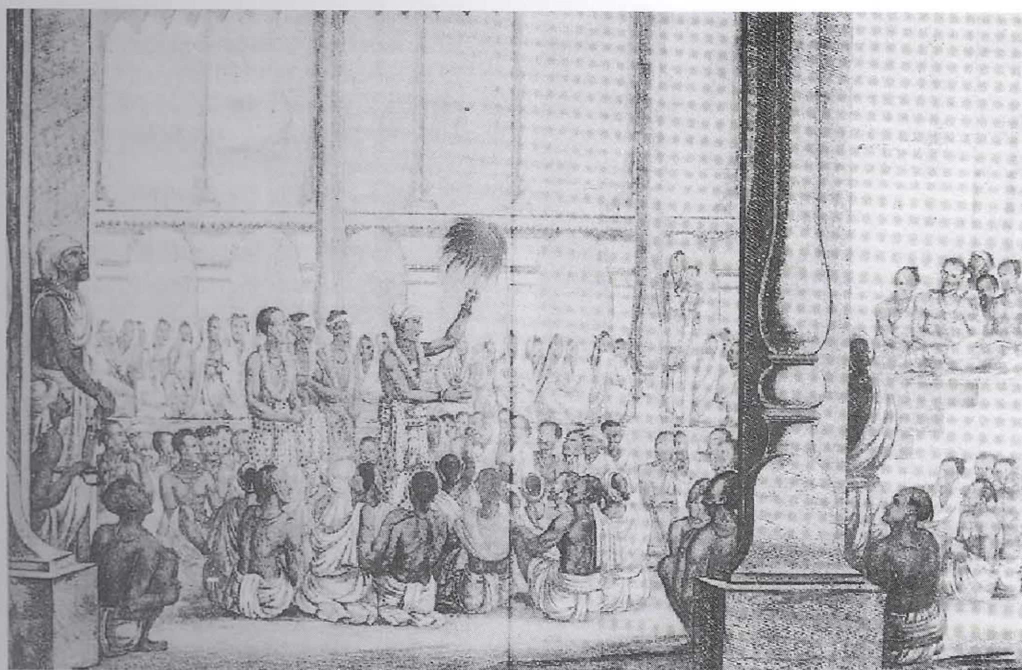
"Kulleem occupied two rooms, one of which the servants explained was his "Palace of Delight," and the other his "Place of Retirement." They went into the former first. The room was elegantly and luxuriously furnished. There was a carpet, and a creaseless drugget of white cloth stretched over it; and a dais, with a costly rug and pillows, and a *hookah* and spitting-vases, conveniently placed. The chairs were of polished wood; and a *punkha*, with fringes of gold and silver lace, was suspended above. Chandeliers and globes of coloured glass hung from the ceiling, in imitation, as it were, of the orbs of heaven. The walls were adorned with pictures and verses from the poets, framed and glazed.

Nussoh gazed at this scene with astonishment, as a person in a trance, and sighed to think of his son's extravagance. His attention was next drawn to a couple of tables, on which were placed cards and dice, musical boxes and flower-jars, *itr* and *pan*; and among other things there was a large handsomely bound volume, which Nussoh at once examined. It was an album containing portraits of the celebrities of his son's familiar world, singers and dancers, wrestlers and eunuchs, jesters and gamblers. He then looked at the pictures and verses on the walls, and found them little else but illustrations of vice and irreligion. He seized a carpet-weight in his indignation and smashed them all to pieces, and hurrying out the contents of the room *en masse*, had them burned in the courtyard.

The "Place of Retirement" was next examined. This was furnished in the same style; but what attracted Nussoh's immediate attention was a cabinet of books. There were a large collection of volumes; but whether Persian or Urdu, all were of the same kind, equally indecent and irreligious… and after Nussooh had examined them one by one, he resolved to commit them also to the flames."[4]

A list of some of the books in the book cabinet, all ultimately consigned to the bonfire, is also provided a little later in the narrative – 'the *Fisanah Ajaib, Gul Bakaoli, Araish Mahfil, Masnavi Mir Hasan, The Jokes of Niamat Khan Ali, Chirkin's Odes, The Satires of Sauda, The Diwan of Jan Sahib, The Bahardanish* &c.' The presence of these books in this recreational space constitutes a dimension common to many depictions of the forthcoming nineteenth-century Indian drawing room.[5]

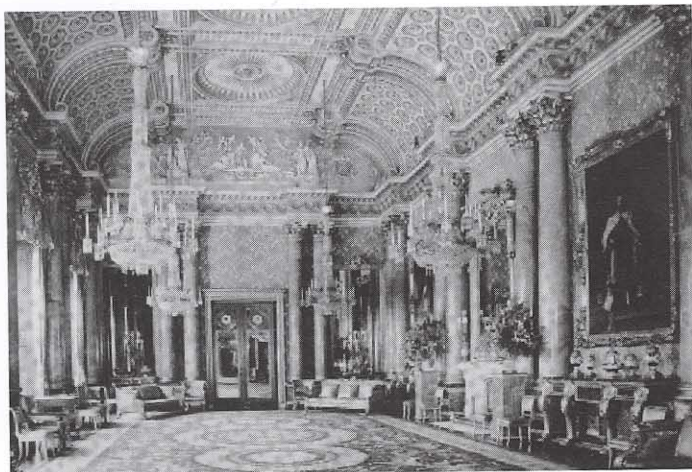
A fascinating account of the transformation of this room in the Tagore house at Jorasanko in Calcutta is given by Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951) in his memoirs. He recreates how, in its older function of the *baithak-khana* at the time of Dwarakanath (1794–1846, Rabindranath's grandfather), the huge hall, covered in an immense red carpet woven with white flowers,



would be bustling at night with bewigged and powdered British dignitaries arrayed on intriguingly carved cushioned mahogany couches watching native performers. Huge quantities of food and drink would be served on gold-embossed china plates stacked on tables in an adjoining enclave, as the dazzling light from hundreds of candles on silver candlesticks, chandeliers, and lanterns turned the room into the brilliant deck of a boat at harbour. Outside the big bay windows, myriad international ships in the harbour could indeed be seen outlined against the sky at dusk, bringing the commercial excitement of trade and profit into the room by association (Tagore 1985: 31–32).

The change that followed is captured well in Abanindranath's description of the year of his birth, 1871, as a time when the dreamscape of the Arabian Nights era in Bengal had ebbed, and the era of Bankimchandra had just begun (ibid.: 33). He then provides another illuminating reminiscence in this context of the same room now used to receive male visitors at the time of Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905, Rabindranath's father), when he entered the forbidden space of the drawing room as a child upon being beckoned in by a gentleman who looked like a sahib. 'I gathered up my courage and went straight to the table, where the bread, biscuits, teacups, porcelain plates and bearer in full insignia had already attracted me...' (ibid.: 55). By the time Rabindranath Tagore was approaching old age in the 1930s, the poet Jasimuddin writes of a 'huge hall-room' being used for theatrical performances, with a proscenium stage erected at one end (Jasimuddin 1368 BE: 2, 9). The performative aspect of the room as *baithak-khana* in the time of Dwarakanath had come to an end, and, by this time, the performances taking place there conformed in an entirely altered sense to a private Western theatre. Meanwhile, the drawing

Figure 7 : *Ramayan-gan*. Solvyns, *Les Hindous* I (1808): Colour engraving. Victoria Memorial. From Sukanta Chaudhuri ed. *Calcutta: The Living City* Vol. 1 (Calcutta: OUP, 1990) 181.



room in its bourgeois aspect, as the location of interactive sessions of conversation and recreation, had shifted to smaller parlours and sitting rooms in individual sections of the house from around the 1880s, testified to by Abanindranath's detailed description of his mother's private drawing room in the inner quarters of their Jorasanko house (Tagore 1985: 25–26).

Town and country: colonial modern aspects

The professional classes were the innovators who first brought a hint of the conception of a drawing room into the house among the Indian middle classes. Nirad Chaudhuri, whose father was a lawyer in Kishorganj, a small town in East Bengal, has given a graphic description of the 'town house' in which they lived from 1903 to 1909, providing us with an invaluable and rare glimpse into the changes colonialism wrought in the provinces. Typical of almost all the houses in that area, their house had, at its centre, the inner courtyard, which was its nucleus. On the western side of this was 'a big hut', known as the West Hut, which, as he describes it, amalgamated certain elements of what, in a later incarnation, would have become the drawing room.

Figure 8 : The Blue Drawing Room, Buckingham Palace. Nirad Chaudhuri mentions that about half a dozen of the great mansions of Calcutta were modest imitations of the Buckingham-Palace style.

"... [This] was the general living and sitting-room for the family and the women visitors (the men visitors, unless very near relations, were not admitted to the inner house), it was also the bedroom of our parents and for some years of us the elder boys as well." (Chaudhuri 1999: 23)

The standard furniture in these rooms at the time were, roughly, two or three very large and heavy beds, one big wooden box 'rather like a Tudor or Jacobean chest', wicker baskets of different sizes for articles of toilet or clothes, a rope suspended from the beams upon which items of daily wear would perpetually hang, and finally, their newest and most valued items, 'English steel trunks', which were 'the rage of the day' (ibid.). But Nirad Chaudhuri's father, being something of a pioneer, had added to these rooms some modern drawing room furniture. Apart from a dressing mirror, which belonged to a conventional Western bedroom, these were, respectively, two so-called 'American' chairs (which were so precious that they were hung from bamboo rails and brought down only when there were important visitors), a table with one single drawer, a glass-fronted cupboard, and two racks with open shelves. The contents of the glass-fronted cupboard give some indication of the penetration of the colonial modern into provincial surroundings:

"On the two top shelves were three wax dolls, three coloured-shell caskets, a green, wire-reinforced bottle with an egg inside, two blue China vases with floral decorations, six silver-

plated spoons in a knitted case, and a few other knickknacks. The next shelf was given over to clothes, and the next lower contained books. Among the books the most prominent for their size or brightness were the Holy Bible in Bengali, Annandale's English Dictionary, Milton's poetical works, Cunningham's History of the Sikhs, two volumes of Burke's speeches on the impeachment of Warren Hastings, Shakespeare's Julius Ceasar and Othello—the latter in the American Hudson edition, a few novels by Bankim Chandra Chatterji, and two volumes of the poetical works of the first modern Bengali poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt.... A row of glass and earthen jars stood on the lowest shelf of the cupboard. If these huts contained anything by way of pictures they were usually very tawdry images of the Hindu gods and goddesses. Here too my father was adventurous. On a pair of stag antlers above the front door of the West Hut rested a coloured reproduction of Raphael's 'Madonna della Sedia'. On one of the wooden posts hung a young girl clasping a dove to her breast .... The third picture was of the boy Christ sitting with a lamb. It was equally nameless. There were two more pictures, very large and gilt-framed, hanging symmetrically on two sides of the back door of the West Hut. They were panoramic pictures of the Boer War, one depicting the battle of Paardeberg, the other the triumphal entry into Pretoria." (Chaudhuri 1999: 26-27)

Speaking of Calcutta, Nirad Chaudhuri mentions that the rich and the Anglicized were the two sections there that had any use for a drawing room. Chaudhuri's description of 'Man and Life in Calcutta' in the early 20th century in the same book makes it quite clear that the middle class Bengali home had no space in it for the luxury of a separate drawing room. In a section here on middle-class homes in Calcutta, which he calls 'The Human Hives', he emphasizes that none of these houses had proper living rooms. 'In some instances one outer room on the ground floor, provided either with a bed, or a table with some chairs, or both, was set apart as a reception-room for visitors'. (ibid.: 382) This was also the room in which the servant slept at night. The rest of the habitable rooms in a middle-class Calcutta house were bedrooms, and those not fit to sleep in were used as kitchen, storeroom and lumber-room.

It was only in the great mansions of Calcutta, half a dozen of which looked like modest imitations of Buckingham Palace, that the most ambitious room, the pièce de resistance, was always the drawing room.



Figure 9 : Joseph Sedley, a 'Nabob', in Thackeray's own illustration for *Vanity Fair*. From Sukanta Chaudhuri ed. *Calcutta: The Living City* Vol. 1 (Calcutta: OUP, 1990) 126.



Figure 10 : Rabindranath Tagore as a young man in a library. Portrait of Tagore, Kurseong, 1895, Birchandra (Photographer), From the Pvt. Collection of Siddhartha Ghosh, CSSSC Archive.

"These rooms were immense, hardly ever less than fifty feet by twenty-five feet and in some cases very much bigger. In the older houses they were built, not as drawing-rooms, but for the exhibition of nautch or Indian ballet dance. During the latter part of the nineteenth-century, however, nearly all of them were converted into drawing-rooms in the European style. In these rooms, too, there were echoes of Buckingham Palace, for with their rugs and carpets, wall and ceiling decorations, screens, mirrors, chandeliers, vases, statuettes, and carved mahogany or gilt Louis Quinze furniture they looked like copies of one or other of the drawing-rooms of the Palace. But the general effect, though patently imitative, was never crude or tawdry. It was in very few instances, indeed, that these rooms revealed any personal taste or even idiosyncrasy, but all were dignified and respectable. Some had pictures, usually heavily framed oil paintings, and mostly family portraits. When they dated from the early nineteenth century or before they showe considerable mastery of technique." (Chaudhu 1999: 378–79) (Figure 8)

The only other residences in Calcutta where drawing room or living room could be obtaine in the sense in which such a room was used by M Bennet's middle-class daughters to sew, pain and play the piano in, in Jane Austen's *Pride an Prejudice* (1813) or that in which Joseph Sedley, ' Nabob', might sit with his wife and help her win wool in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), were thos of the Anglicized Bengalis - mostly barristers an their families - living in the old Ballygunge o Chowringhee quarter. (Figure 9) This section o society, wherein the men were invariably calle sahibs instead of babus, lived in aristocrati segregation due to a dislike of ordinary Benga society that extended both ways. Nira Chaudhuri is admiring of the exactitude of the imitativeness, commenting that 'a wrong tie o hat was likely to give rise to more trouble amon them than in the best English society' (ibid.: 397 This was the class, popularly and derisivel referred to as the *Ingo-Bongo*, which lived i houses that looked exactly like the residence o an English gentleman, with their homes provide with the 'usual drawing-rooms, dining-room and studies' (ibid.: 397).

The printed book in the bhadralok drawing room

Printed books were often indispensable to th bhadralok (the gentrified educated clas Bengali's drawing room, which combine elements of the study and the living room in it aspect. The advent of the drawing room ha

many similarities with the coming of the printed book; both these processes, linked to an English education in infinitesimal ways, changed the cultural contours of Bengali lives forever. Reading, a vital part of the cultured man's domain, thus acquires a material dispensation, and the presence of books becomes inescapably conjoined to the mental landscape of the bhadralok drawing room in colonial Bengal. Once again, though, a distinction needs to be made between upper- and middle-class homes in this context. It was in the middle-class home that books made their appearance in the space of the drawing room; in upper-class mansions, the study or library was an independent room, entirely lined with books, and furnished with chairs, tables and other paraphernalia for the facilitation of study, as evidenced in numerous photographs of the members of the Tagore family in such spaces. (See Figure 10; Figure 11) Even into such pristine surroundings, the Indian aesthetic ethic was introduced with élan. A vivid depiction of the local transformations wrought in the classical conception of the library is to be found in Bimal Roy's film, *Udayer Pathey* (1944), where the upper-class villain proudly shows off the Gujarati swing and the 'original Jamini Roy' within the space of his well equipped library with its open stacks of books and fine desk with ink stand and writing paper. (See Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 14) This space would be quite separate from the drawing room, which was entirely decorative and social in character, as is to be seen in the same film in the sequence where the child's birthday party is held and a song is sung by the hero's sister, or again in the scene in which the heroine sings a song to herself, unaware of an unknown appreciative listener behind her. (Figure 15) This stock scene of the drawing-room song was depicted in pan-Indian stereotypical film sequences till the 1960s in two essential variations – either as the place where accomplished women in saris or men in dinner jackets play the piano and sing - at birthday parties or simply cocktail parties - while other guests relax on upholstered sofa sets with a drink, or as the solitary space in which the performer is either unaware of being heard, or exists in a relationship of some tension with his or her audience. (Figure 16, *Gumraah*)

The lines along which the intellectual bhadralok drawing room, on the other hand, evolved can be surmised from a description of the Chandannagar drawing room of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in 1890, a year or so before his death. Some of the most fiercely independent-minded intellectuals of nineteenth-century Bengal were



Figure 11 : Samarendranath Tagore & Satyaprasad Ganguly, 1890s, Gaganendranath Tagore (Photographer), From the Pvt. Collection of Siddhartha Ghosh, CSSSC Archive.

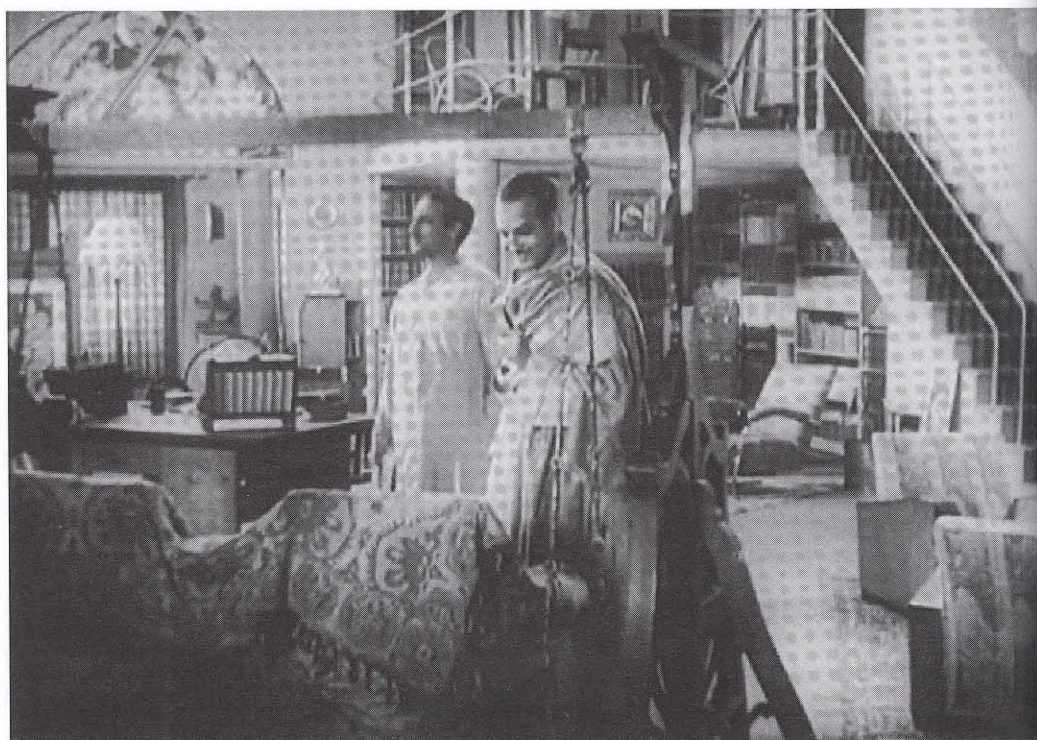


Figure 12 : *Udayer Pathey* (1944) The feckless rich man (Devi Mukherjee), points to the Gujarati swing in his library with pride, while the sharp-witted protagonist (Radhamohan Bhattacharya), comments on the usefulness of having somewhere to sleep in a library.

among the most receptive to English influences; Vidyasagar was certainly one among them. Asked to weigh the pros and cons of English colonization in Bengal, he had, with characteristic clever satire, replied:

"On the whole, I feel that we have received three good things from the English ... First, English literature. The literature of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Sir Walter Scott and others that we have got from them—do not underestimate their value. Second gain—ice. In the searing heat of summer, put one piece of ice in a tumbler of water, and your relief is immense. And the third is sliced bread .... You laugh at what I say? But tell me, did we have anything comparable to sliced bread in our country before? Soak a slice of bread in a bowl of milk and have it, and you will be full, and you will also not fall ill." (Chattopadhyay 1998: 16)

Apart from the widely perceived medical benefits, the issue of sliced bread, however, was much more provocative than the simple humour here indicates. Produced in bakeries run by Christians or Muslims, this humble staple was considered forbidden food by the majority of orthodox Hindus. Abanindranath, going on with his anecdote of a sahib being served tea in the drawing room that I have quoted earlier, had continued: 'A few minutes later I came out munching a slice of buttered bread and ran straight into Kedardada. Habituated to saying "sala" (an obscenity) from boyhood, he gave my ear a twist and said, "Done, sala, you're baptized now"'. Shunned by his sisters, scolded by the maids, reprimanded by aunts, the news, he finds has spread to the store room and the offices, until after a couple of days, his youngest aunt enquiring into his sadness, is tragically told: 'Aunt

I have been baptized'. A solemn sprinkling of holy Ganges water then resolves the row (Tagore 1985:55).

In the context of his living room too, Vidyasagar was as progressive as his attitude towards sliced bread indicates, and he appears to have been equally appreciative of the merits of Western-style furniture and fittings, although it has to be conceded that his attitude towards the Western-style toilet was somewhat more dismissive. Jogendrakumar Chattopadhyay gives us a description of his drawing room in Chandannagar:

"Entering the room, I was taken aback in wonder. Was this the sitting room of a Brahmin pundit or the drawing room of a European gentleman? A huge hall, surrounded on three sides by books arranged upon rows and rows of bookcases. All the books were beautifully bound and shining. Right in the centre, there was a big table surrounded by many chairs. On the north side, against the wall there was a small bed, which is where Vidyasagar slept. On the western wall, above the bookcases there were two oil paintings hung next to each other. Later I heard these were portraits of his mother and father .... The chairs, table, bookcases, bed and other furniture in this hall were all so clean and well-maintained that they looked as if they had only recently been bought and not used as yet..." (Chattopadhyay 1998:7–8)[6]

On the other hand, as the anomalous presence of a bed in that space indicates, the uses to which some of the furniture in this room was put remained steadfastly Indian, such as the functionality of the space under the bed. Used to store pots of sweetmeats, which he would then arrange on plates and hand out personally to the visitors in this room, ending the procedure with a



Figure 13 : *Udayer Pathey* (1944) The 'original' Jamini Roy painting, being shown off to the visitor.



Figure 14 : *Udayer Pathey* (1944) Finally, the books in the library.

careful ritual of *paan* making(spices wrapped in betel leaf), the space under the bed and the bed itself were put to uses that were quintessentially Indian in conception. A famous photograph of the extended family of the Tagores shows the men spread out upon the thick rug or *phorash bichhana* in this room, sprawled around in various positions of absolute rest. (Figure 17) This co-existence of different times coming together in the space of the modern that Vidyasagar or the Tagores inhabited was typical of the time-space of modern life. In its manifestation in the dimensions of the drawing room, it remained uneven in its uses; thus children could use the same space for private lessons in the daytime and servants to sleep in by night.

The advent of women

The start of the 20th century would have been about the time that women were first being allowed into the drawing room to interact with men who were not part of the family; at about the same time, though there seems to be no obvious correspondence between the two, the strong influence of the Swadeshi movement was also permeating the aesthetics of this living space.[7] Both elements are dramatically captured in Rabindranath's *Ghare Baire* (Home and the World), among other equally epochal novels; and I shall attempt to trace the evolution of this modern sensibility through the Tagore lineage in both fiction and fact in the following section. The influence of progressive and moralizing Brahmo leaders such as Shibnath Sastri upon the institution of the Bengali drawing room and the woman's place in it cannot be ignored; however, the Tagore family's distinctive sense of style was an innovation from the conventional Brahmo norm, and it left an indelible imprint upon Bengali and, by extension, Indian culture. This is well documented in instances such as the draping of the modern sari, which was devised by

Jnanadanandini Debi, wife of Satyendranath Tagore, the first Indian ICS, who was inspired by the Gujarati/Parsi style in her adaptation. The dress of the men in this family, too, was unique and emphatically indigenous; the mystical flowing robes adopted by the later Rabindranath were only an extension of the style of brothers such as Jyotirindranath, who wore loose-fitting long shirts and loose pants known in Bengali as the *ijar-chapkan*. The poet Nabinchandra Sen, who studied with Jyotirindranath, at his first meeting with the young Rabindranath in 1876 or 1877 at a 'National mela' in suburban Calcutta, recalls:

"I saw a handsome young man wearing a loose white *ijar-chapkan* standing under an enormous tree in one corner of the garden. Age: 18/19; calm and still. It was as if a golden image of a god had been installed under the shade of that tree.... I looked, and saw the same good looks, the same clothes." (Sen 1366 B.E.: 59)

The Hindu mela, as the National mela was subsequently called, was first organized by the Tagore family in association with Nabogopal Mitra in 1867, and encouraged local crafts and skills, placing emphasis on the appreciation of the indigenous that later reached an apotheosis in the politics of the Swadeshi movement.[8]

In a significant passage in *Ghare Baire*, Bimala comments on the politics of her husband Nikhilesh's aesthetic sense:

"He used to use an ordinary brass pot on his desk as a vase. On many occasions, when I knew that a sahib would be visiting, I would secretly remove that pot and replace it with an English coloured-



Figure 15 : *Udayer Pathey* (1944) Gopa (Binota Roy) sings a song in her own drawing room while Anup (Radhamohan Bhattacharya) listens in the background unknown to her; a stock situation in Indian cinema of the period.



glass vase, in which I would arrange some flowers. My husband would say, 'Look Bimal, the brass pot is as unselfconscious as these flowers. But that English vase of yours proclaims too loudly that it is a vase—instead of keeping real flowers in it, you should fill it with artificial flowers." (Tagore 1409 BE: 529) (Figure 18)

This use of the brass pot constitutes an ethnicization of the indigenous that is in reality the result of a Europeanization of tastes; the appreciation of homemade things comes to Rabindranath all the more easily because he has learnt, from his family, to look at these things with different eyes. Dineshchandra Sen had complained, with reference to Rabindranath's literary works, 'Bengal has not given Rabindranath to Europe—rather Europe has given him to the Bengalis ...' (cited in Chakrabarty 2001: 158), an accusation taken further by Buddhadeva Bose and Sudhindranath Datta, poets of the post-1930s, who also felt, in Bose's words, that 'Rabindranath's works are European literature written in Bengali language and they are the first of its kind' (ibid.). This Europeanization of the mind that the critics were complaining about is encapsulated quite wonderfully in this small episode in *Ghare Baire*; the beauty of the brass pot is obvious to Nikhilesh, the character Rabindranath is the most sympathetic towards and self-identified with, while the local craftsman who made the brass pot would of course never have used it to display flowers in the manner that Nikhilesh does. Bimala's biting sarcasm of the poor economics of engaging in patriotic gestures of the sort her husband indulges in finds space within the novel itself, but in his home in Santiniketan, however, the poet Rabindranath established a cultural style that was firmly in alliance with Nikhilesh's. With his inherited background of the unique spaces of Jorasanko, and with the able backing of Abanindranath's artistic style and the endeavours of the entire art school at Visva-Bharati,

Figure 16 : *Gumraah* (1963) Sunil Dutt sings a song full of unrequited love while a tense Mala Sinha and her unknowing husband, played by Ashok Kumar, look on.

Rabindranath consciously founded a style and an aesthetic that were to become influential markers of 'culture' in post-Independence India.

Visitors to Santiniketan were so struck by the individual sense of style surrounding Rabindranath that they have often left detailed descriptions of these locations. Buddhadeva Bose, in his account (called *Shob Peyechhir Deshe*, [Wish-Fulfilling Country]) of a visit to meet the poet a year before his death in 1941, has left a vivid sense of the ambience Rabindranath created. At one of Rabindranath's homes there, 'Udayan', where he is conducted around by Rabindranath himself, he is intrigued by the use of space, the

"...many corners, crossings, and ups and downs, through which a sense of complete rhythm is experienced both inside the house, and manifested in its outer appearance as well. Besides, there is no end to the number of paintings and art works spread all over the house. In the first floor drawing room and big dining room there were only Rabindranath's own paintings; in other areas of the house, I saw the works of Abanindra, Gaganendra, Nandalal, Rathindranath, Pratima Debi and others. There was something to be seen in every corner of the house..." (Bose 2001: 19)

In Santiniketan, Buddhadeva Bose remarks, 'the houses are low, the windows are low, the furniture too is low. Endless praise may be showered on the windows here. I have never seen such generous open windows in our country before' (ibid.: 21). He continues:

"Here I did not see anything, even of the smallest necessity, that was not beautiful. Not only new,



Figure 17 : Afternoon siesta in the drawing room at the Tagore's. Jorasanko, 1890s. Gaganendranath Tagore (Photographer), From the Pvt. Collection of Sidhartha Ghosh, CSSSC Archive.

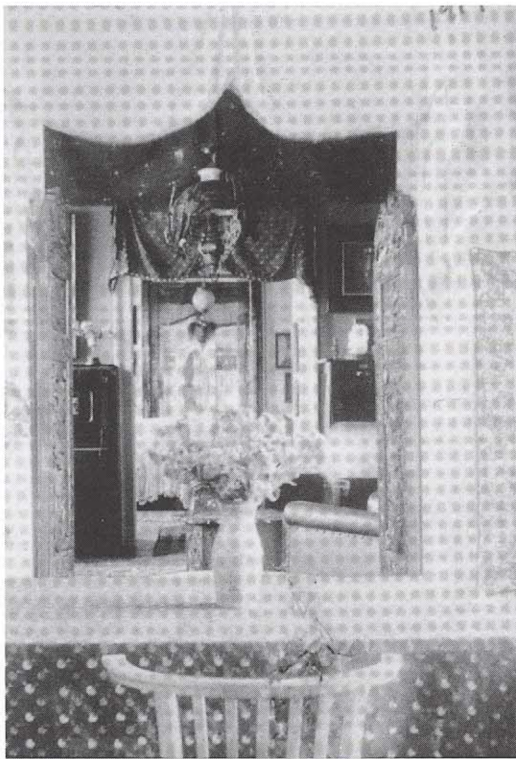


Figure 18 : '...an English coloured-glass vase, in which I would arrange some flowers...' Presumably, Bimala's conception of the proper use of a vase stemmed from the sort of flower arrangement seen here in this typically bourgeois elite home of one of the leading artistic families in India at the time. From the home of Umrao Sher-Gill, father of artist Amrita Sher-Gill. Studies of the interior of their home, 1914, Bromide Print, Umrao Singh Sher Gill (Photographer), From the Pvt. Collection of Vivan Sundaram, CSSSC Archive

but also novel, not only novel, but especially endowed with character. A firm individuality permeated every item. Chairs, tables, beds, curtains, everything had a restrained orderliness; opulent excess was entirely absent here, the East and the West have come together here too. The things were structurally English, but composed to an Indian rhythm (ibid.: 22)." (Figure 19)

He concludes, 'A combination of the East and the West is the speciality of the Tagores; this family that has given direction to the destiny of Bengal is at the same time authentically Bengali and essentially English' (Bose 2001: 18).

Apart from its exploration of an indigenous aesthetic whereby the local and the rural is aggrandized in comparison with the foreign and the machine-made (a trope used also in Rabindranath's introduction to Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majumdar's collection of Bengali fairy tales, *Thakurmar Jhuli* [*Grandma's Bag*, 1923], wherein he laments, in his introduction to the book : 'must our fairy tales also come to us from Manchester mills?'), *Ghare Baire* also explores the eventualities of bringing the modern Bengali woman into the drawing room. In 1876, when the Prince of Wales visited Calcutta, he had expressed a desire to see a respectable Bengali 'zenana'; consequently, a well-known Bengali lawyer at the High Court, Jagadananda Mukhopadhyay, had invited him to his residence, where he was received and felicitated by the women of the house. A huge controversy was ignited in the Bengali press and in society, with leading poet Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay (1838-1903) writing a very popular satire on the subject, *Bajimat* (*Checkmate*) (Bandyopadhyay 1372 BE: 22). In the same year, the Great National Theatre staged a farce by Upendranath Das called *Gajadananda o Yuvaraj* (*Gajadananda and the Prince*) on the same topic, which was proscribed by the government and led, ultimately, to the enactment of the Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876, putting an end to the production of political satires or farces (Mukherjee 1982: 45). Women were obviously still not expected to socialize in the formal drawing rooms of the house at this time. Forty years later when *Ghaire Baire* appeared, however, while Bimala's excursion into the public space of the drawing room ends in unmitigated disaster in the novel itself, the principle whereby women were to be encouraged to take up their legitimate role in the dichotomous space of the drawing room was somewhat tenuously in the process of being established.

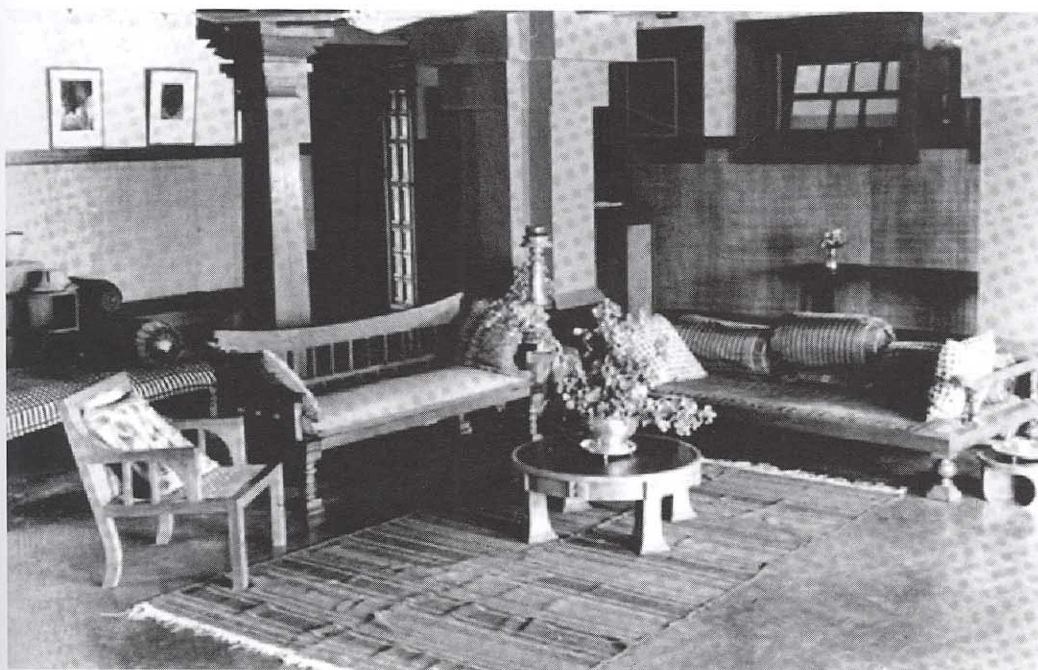


Figure 19 : 'The things were structurally English, but composed to an Indian rhythm.' Note the flowers spread out in an indigenous brass bowl. Drawing room of 'Konarak' House, Santiniketan. From the Rabindra Bhavan Museum Collection, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan.

Rabindranath's own novels are a potent source whereby this evolution from the inner quarters to the outer may be traced; in contrast, the earlier works of Bankimchandra, for instance, have no similar situational aspect, although there is a vivid and detailed description of Surjamukhi's bedroom in *Bishabrikkha* (*Poison-tree*). Novels such as Rabindranath's *Noukadubi* (*The Boat Wreck*), on the other hand, are so heavily dependent on the drawing room interactions of the principal characters Ramesh and Hemnalini that the ritual of pouring out tea, performed by Hemnalini, and the attendant conversations, are an integral device for much of the narrative to move forward. Hemnalini belongs to a Brahmo family - not Anglicized but progressive - and the setting is presumably turn of the century (the novel was written in1906). In this she is identical to Sucharita, the heroine of *Gora* (1910), although the action in *Gora* is less drawing-room centred. Intelligent, educated women, special daughters of indulgent fathers—these are women characters who hold their own in any argument and are extremely articulate, whether in the drawing room or outside of it. *Gora* was followed by *Ghare Baire* in 1915, and here, once again, the induction of a woman into the drawing room, propelled there by an indulgent and ideologically motivated husband, is a central topic.

These fictional heroines were not merely novelistic creations confined to the pages of fiction; they had their real-life counterparts in Bengali society of the time. Maitreyi Debi, author of a memoir, *Na Hanyate* (*Invincible*), notorious for its description of her love affair with a European in the Calcutta of the 1930s, herself epitomized such heroine-like traits and gives us a fascinating account of such women in Calcutta society (Debi 1974). Daughter of a lenient and intellectual father, acolyte of Rabindranath, opinionated and intelligent, she mentions a number of women of her time, older than herself, renowned for their intellect, beauty and regal presence. She speaks

of the poetess Kamini Ray, well known for her poetry and for being loved by two of Bengal's most distinguished men, Jagadish Chandra Bose and P.C. Ray; another woman poet, Priyamvada Debi, for whom there was a proposal to marry Rabindranath after the death of his wife, and who was loved by the Japanese aesthete and scholar Okakura, who did a portrait of her; and many other multi-talented intellectual women writers—Sarala Debi, Hiranmayi Debi, Indira Debi. 'Each of these names are noteworthy, and I was accustomed to seeing them next to each other in gatherings and at meetings—all of them wore the sari in the Brahmika way, had Japanese fans in their hands, and were the very symbol of aristocracy' (Debi 1993: 103). The proximity of these women to the Tagores, it is conceded, was part of their attraction for Maitreyi Debi, and she mentions that another writer, Anurupa Debi, was not part of this set on social occasions.

The intellectual Bengali aesthetic

The Westernization of the Bengali home of Maitreyi Debi's father, Surendranath Dasgupta, a renowned scholar and university professor, began with the import of a large mahogany dining table in 1924, seeing which her grandmother had commented— 'What! Why should one eat off this thing? What is the harm in sleeping on it? It is a bed after all' (ibid.: 14). Of the drawing room, and of the conflicting pressures that created such a room, Maitreyi Debi commented:

"At this time (1930) because of the coming and going of foreigners and our interactions with the Calcutta 'elite', the décor of our house was changing bit by bit. In this matter, it was I who was at the forefront, my mother could not cope with all of this. Baba and I would often go to an auction house named Egbert Andrews and bring home all sorts of new furniture. It was my job to polish the brassware from Delhi and Kanpur, even the door handles and bolts on the doors." (ibid.: 22)

More interestingly, she attempts, in her own room, to imitate the distinctive Tagore style she has seen since she was thirteen. In 1930, she has only recently acquired 'a room of her own', although shared by two younger sisters at night. She has done up the room beautifully, putting in 'low furniture'. 'I cut off the legs of the bed to make it low', she asserts, and among the principal items in the room are flowers and incense sticks and a photograph of Rabindranath, whose eyes seemed to follow her to every corner. Just preceding this account is a description of a visit to Rabindranath at his Calcutta Jorasanko residence to a room she calls the 'stone room'. She can still picture that space vividly, with its 'low chairs or stools (chouki) upholstered with Japanese matting, with even the cushions wrapped in Japanese mats. This room later changed many times; this was the room in which he breathed his last' (Debi 1993: 21). (Figure 20) Buddhadeva Bose, on the other hand, has described the room in Santiniketan where Rabindranath was confined in his last days, with its bed made out of packing cases and Japanese paintings on the walls. Maitreyi Debi's account provides us with many small details that fill in this narrative of the nationalization of the drawing room. 'I learnt from looking', she says,



"...from all I saw in the Tagore house (thakurbari). It was there that I saw furniture with Swadeshi designs. Here [in the hills] wood of many different colours is available, and I use it to make furniture in a Swadeshi design; none of our curtains and cushions is made of English prints—I got an Oriya *purohit* (Hindu priest) to make me a length of cloth consisting entirely of the border of the dhoti they wear. At this time, it was very difficult to procure anything at all of an indigenous design in shops. One had to go to the villages in the districts to obtain specimens of local handicrafts." (Figure 21)

The conversation she has with the weaver is an ironic replay of Nikhilesh's perception of the brass pot in *Ghare Baire*:

"When I told the weaver—make me two lengths of that border alone—he was wide-eyed. He simply would not do it. 'What do you lose by doing it? You shall be paid for it.' 'But I have never done it in this way, ma.' That is the trouble with our country—what they have not done before they do not want to do—whether he be a weaver or a pundit." (ibid.: 166–67)

To complete the story of the acquired local and imported skills that went into the making of a nationalized drawing room, one would have to include a paragraph on the art of flower arrangement. Japanese flower decoration was all the rage in the 1940s, Maitreyi Debi does not neglect to tell us, and she asserts her independence of spirit by commenting that she does not have a taste for it, as it appears artificial to her. In Bengal, flowers had generally been part of ritual, not home decoration, and she complains:

"And the Bengalis know nothing of flower decoration. If you just look at the bunches on sale in Bowbazar you will realize that. The flowers are bound tightly in *debdaru* leaves and wire. How

Figure 20 : '...low chairs or stools (chouki) upholstered with Japanese matting, with even the cushions wrapped in Japanese mats.'(Debi 1993: 21). Notice how here the walls too are partially wrapped in bamboo matting (*shital pati*). From the Rabindra Bhavan Museum Collection, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan.

long will flowers live under such torture? Otherwise they take two or three flowers and shove them into a rickety vase. I have been enchanted by the way in which an Englishwoman here arranges her flowers. In a corner of the room she has placed an entire flowering branch. You need to put flowers in receptacles that allow the leaves and flowers to spread out." (Debi 1993: 166)

The overwhelming influence of the style propagated by Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan upon Maitreyi Debi is acknowledged in her own ironic asides that admit that she is biased in this regard. On a certain occasion, explaining the custom of greeting each other with a namaskar with folded hands as a habit inculcated by Rabindranath among his students—a practice not followed and even laughed at elsewhere in the country (ibid.: 11)—she faces an astonished response from the young European student: 'Does that one man do everything for you?' 'Yes, yes', she insists, giving way to hyperbole and exaggeration: 'That one man alone is spread across our skies, gives us words with which to speak, fills our minds with love—because of him the stars bloom across our skies at night, and flowers bloom in the woods at dawn.' (ibid.: 11)

Hopefully, the attempt here to show how the Tagores influenced a certain appreciation of the indigenous and its entry into the space of the drawing rooms of the intellectually and artistically inclined by the early years of the 20th century will not be accused, as Maitreyi Debi was, of attributing all the changes that took place to 'that one man'. It is an incontestable fact, however, that a certain change did occur in the artefacts and appurtenances that began to enter Indian homes from the Swadeshi era onward, replacing the previous purely Western style of drawing room. This nationalization of the ambience of the drawing room originated, it is my contention, in a large part from the self-conscious aesthetic sense permeating from Santiniketan/Sriniketan, the Tagores themselves, and the friends and artists surrounding these men, women, and places.[9] Attempting to trace the evolution of the space of the Indian drawing room within the Bengali home, a narrative of sorts may perhaps now be constructed. In the late eighteenth century, a Persianized conception of a reception room or room for entertainment entered the homes of the wealthy, whether urban or rural landed gentry—this was referred to by its Hindustani name, the *baithak-khana*. This *baithak-khana* was transformed, over the course of the 19th century, into the bourgeois drawing room. In its first incarnation in the homes of the educated elite, this room was a mirror image of the Western drawing room. To use Nirad Chaudhuri's term, in the mansions of the rich in Calcutta, these rooms were in the 'Buckingham Palace' style—vast, opulent, chandeliered replicas of English aristocratic taste. In its appearance it remained, for almost all of the 19th century, a replica of its Western image, transplanting the wall clock and the oil painting, the sofas and the cushioned chairs, the carpets and the lamps on to this alien landscape. Gradually, as the need for such a room filtered down among the upper classes and then the middle classes, a slow process of democratization



began, and the uses to which some of this space was sometimes put, could be, as we have seen, quite surprisingly versatile. In form and aspect, then, the room essentially conjoined the Western with the Indian in its innovative use of space and décor until it achieved a synthesis that we take unconsciously for granted today.

This essay has attempted to establish the advent of a particular Swadeshi style, if one may call it that, in the appearance and manner of the Indian drawing room of a particular section of educated society at the start of the twentieth century, a style encapsulated today in the Fabindia stores across the country selling ethnicity to the urban Indian. As the twentieth century wore on, the taste of the intellectual Calcutta elite began to veer towards the ethnic, the indigenous and the folk, while on another level, the winds of international aesthetic sense began to sweep through it in the incorporation, for instance, of Japanese sensibility. The Tagores and the Bengal school of art had much to contribute to this change in taste, as I have tried to show, though there were certainly other influential figures such as Guru Saday Dutt (1882-1941) who contributed intrinsically to this changed artistry. This was also conjoined in myriad ways to the nationalization of the art movement in India, with art critics such as Havell and Coomaraswamy and artists such as Abanindranath Tagore and Ravi Varma presenting, from the 1920s onward, the architecture and the aesthetics of the country to its people, now bestowing on Indian art a new spirit of nationalism (Guha-Thakurta 1996: 78). The Santiniketan/Sriniketan style was distinctive, with its patterned leather cane stools called the *mora*, its low utilitarian furniture, its use of handloom materials in the curtains and upholstery, the replacement of English china

Figure 21 : '...furniture in a Swadeshi design; none of our curtains and cushions is made of English prints...' Drawing room of Tagore's house, 'Udayan', Santiniketan. From the Rabindra Bhavan Museum Collection, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan.

vases with indigenous brass pots, of Western style oil paintings with Indian art works, or, in the case of the less affluent, with Jamini Roy prints. Thus, at last, the drawing room in its essentially bourgeois and middle-class conception came into its own in a certain section of educated and artistic society. This style, it needs to be emphasized, was always elitist, if not in purely monetary terms, certainly in terms of the education and background of those who propagated it. Meanwhile, the ordinary Bengali household in Calcutta was either untouched by, or losing its grip on this particular style, if indeed the style had ever permeated it in any concrete way. (The clay dolls, books and bric a brac on concrete alcoves in the sitting room recalled in the mofussil house by Nirad Chaudhuri found its incarnation in these homes in an altogether different aesthetic which would need separate treatment elsewhere.) Pramathanath Bisi, a leading Bengali critic writing in the 1960s, described '... the concerns of our contemporary world .... Nowadays we live in two-room flats in apartment blocks, and one of those rooms we fill up with the clutter of sofa settees ...' (Bisi 1968: ii). This 'clutter of sofa settees' in 'two-room flats' speaks of the ordinary, more common conception of the drawing room among the people at large, which reflected not only of a paucity of means but also of the lack of a Tagorean aesthetic, which had never depended upon expensive materials for its creation. Aristocratic homes in Britain had had a different use for them, and the mansions of the pre-colonial rich in India had no place for them, but the colonization of the structure and arrangement of the Bengali urban house had begun with the institutionalization of a mandatory drawing room in every ambitious home by the late 19th to early 20th century, and attained its egalitarian middle-class calling in India only by the 1920s or 1930s, whatever the mode in which it existed.

Acknowledgment

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NOTES

1. Attempting to locate the spaces in which *adda* flourished, Chakrabarty writes about parks, rooftops, teashops, the rawk (an elevated concrete strip attached to the front of houses in Calcutta upon which idlers dawdle), even the school, but mentions the drawing room only in passing. Is this because the adda was never located in the semi-formal space of the Bengali drawing room? Yet if the democratization of Indian society was in many ways symbolized by the practice of adda, to an equal extent, it could be said that the evolution of the social and familial space of the drawing room was a marker of that process too.

2. The term *phorash-bichhana* is difficult to translate. Literally '*phorash*' is French, and '*bichhana*' is spread or bedding; the word denoted a type of Oriental mattress on the floor, often spread with cushions and smoking equipment, upon which people were seated.

3. It should be mentioned, in all fairness, that this nationalist reaction to Young Bengal was often directed at the hangers-on and followers at the periphery rather than at the core group of Derozio's students, who had, in most cases, real merit and accomplishment at the back of the wildest excesses of their reformist youth.

4. Nazir Ahmed, *The Repentance of Nussooh [Taubat-al-Nasuh]* (first published in 1884) Trans. M.Kempson, Ed. C.M. Naim (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004) 58-59.

5. Ibid., 60.

6. Chattopadhyay continues: 'When I asked him one day, with childish inquisitiveness, how the backs of his chairs were so clean, he laughed and replied, 'I never lean back upon a chair, so how will it get dirty? ... If you lean back on a chair, your spine becomes bent, and people become lazy. If you lean back long enough you feel like putting your feet up on the table. I always sit quite straight, never leaning back or hunched in front.' (Chattopadhyay 1998: 7–8). I am indebted to Gautam Bhadra for bringing this book to my attention.

7. The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal (1905-1911) originated in protests against Curzon's plan to partition Bengal in 1905 and involved the boycotting of foreign goods in favour of those that were indigenously produced. Curzon's partition of Bengal was repealed in 1911, but Gandhi subsequently adopted the concept and made it a cornerstone of the struggle for independence.

8. Nabogopal Mitra (1840?-1898) was best known for his contribution to nineteenth-century nationalism through his work in organising the Hindu Mela with the Tagore family. He was a member of the Tattwabodhi Sabha and editor of a newspaper called the National Paper, founded a society called the National Society, and a school called the National School. His predilection for the prefix 'National' to all his enterprises resulted in his being known, in his time, as National Nabagopal.

9. Three persons need special mention in this context: Rathindranath Tagore (1888-1961), Rabindranath's son, who was himself accomplished in woodwork, leatherwork and furniture-design; Surendranath Kar (1892-1970), student of Abanindranath Tagore and prominent Bengal School artist, who was the main architect and designer of the Uttarayan complex at Santiniketan in the 1920s; and, of course, Nandalal Bose (1883-1966), head of Kala Bhavan, whose aesthetic sense left a prominent mark upon the cultural ambience of Santiniketan.

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